

Testimony of
Carol Gale, President
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**HB-6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**Appropriations Committee
February 23, 2023**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Governor's proposed budget for childcare and public education. My name is Carol Gale and I live in Hartford. I submit this written testimony on HB 6659 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2025, and making appropriations therefor.

I am the president of the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT), a union of school professionals which is here to support Connecticut's students. Our organization represents approximately 2000 members in the state. Prior to leading the HFT, I taught in the Hartford Public School System for 30 years. I'm also a member of Recovery For All—a statewide coalition bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations across Connecticut.

As a teacher, Hartford resident, and president of the teacher's union, I see first hand the inequities that plague our educational system. Only 8 out of 39 schools in Hartford provide their students with art and music education by a certified teacher as well as a staffed library. With limited funds, school principals have to make decisions such as to hire an art teacher or a computer science teacher- they can not afford both. The lack of a broad and well rounded education creates opportunity gaps for city youth, creating a disadvantage at the outset of their educational career. Without an art and music teacher, without the quiet space of a library to learn to love literacy, schools lose opportunities to engage students and give them avenues for self-expression. Therein lies an overlooked factor in the debates over chronic absenteeism.

Our city schools do not need more testing, they need smaller class sizes so students get the attention they need. They do not need extended time devoted to reading to make up for lost learning. They need to have a broad curriculum that exposes them to social studies, science, the arts, and world languages. They do not need more data points, reports, and unnecessary paperwork. They need more joy.

School based staff, from custodians to principals, are stretched too thin. We are understaffed meaning everyone is taking on some portion of the jobs that remain unfilled. A staff member may hit their breaking point and decide to resign. Our students, however, have no choice but to remain in a school where stress is the overriding emotion instead of joy. Hartford's salaries for teachers are not competitive making it difficult to recruit and retain teachers, paraeducators, security officers and many other positions. Imagine being in the seventh grade and not having had math class with a certified math teacher all year. That is a reality in Hartford. Our students deserve the stability of a fully staffed school.

Connecticut, the wealthiest state in the country, should guarantee every child can thrive and learn, regardless of zip code. Decades of inequitable public school funding is short-changing our public school children from our highest needs districts. Those who need the most support are getting the lowest funding. What does real equity mean?

- That preK-12 public schools are **fully staffed** with teachers, paraeducators, school counselors, nurses, social workers, librarians, etc. who meet the comprehensive needs of every child in every community.
- That school districts serving greater numbers of **students with high needs should have more funding** per child, to meet those needs.
- That **all schools receiving public funds are accountable** to the children, families, and communities they serve, and to our elected leaders.

Our state faces a multibillion-dollar surplus, an overflowing Rainy Day Fund, and prosperity for our wealthiest corporations and residents. At the same time, students in many communities statewide are paying the price of disinvestment in our preK-12 public schools. We have a historic opportunity *this session* to fully fund our public schools to guarantee the highest quality public education for *every* student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents' make.

I urge this Committee to fully fund the ECS formula and Childcare this year. Our public schools have a severe teacher shortage and staffing shortage. Funding the ECS formula is the bare minimum that public schools need, so that our students can thrive. Students are not getting the ELL and special education services they need, because of the lack of funding and staffing. Some students have no teacher at all.

I urge this Committee to keep the charter school formula the way it is. Any changes to the charter school funding formula must include accountability and transparency measures for charter schools. Schools that receive public dollars must be accountable to the children they teach and care for, their families and communities and to our elected leaders. Without accountability, we can't ensure equity for our kids.

I urge the Committee to fully fund Childcare and Early Childhood Education. Care4Kids is the state subsidized early childcare program. It pays providers too little and serves

a fraction of the families that struggle with child care costs. Wages for Early Educators are too low. And payments to State Funded ECE programs are too low. Our children are worthy of fully funded childcare!

In conclusion, I urge you to fully fund our public schools and childcare this year.

Thank you.

Carol Gale
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